

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am from Ansonia Connecticut and a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence. I am currently employed in Shelton as an IT engineer, but have spent many years as a social worker and educator in New York City. I have lived in Connecticut for twenty five years.

During my social work career, I helped mental outpatients, people who were homeless, who were mentally ill, and people who had drug addiction problems. A number of them took their lives. This was in the nineteen eighties when firearms were more difficult to get. Since then, the accessibility of firearms has increased making it easier for those at-risk to gain access and kill themselves, and/or potentially, others. Removing weapons from people who are at risk just makes sense. It provides a time opportunity for those who can help to de-escalate a violent or suicidal state and reduce the frequency and impact of suicidal and violent episodes that would otherwise play out if a person had access to a firearm.

Certainly, allowing someone who is suspected of having violent and/or suicidal tendency to have access to firearms constitutes a safety risk, and does no good service to the public. If the purpose of gun ownership is to save lives by protecting the individual owner from harm, it is doing the opposite when the owner sees himself or herself as the threat, and it is doing the opposite if the owner sees others as a threat because he or she is in an unstable mental state. For this reason, it is no surprise to me that the Extreme Risk Protection Order has worked so well in our state. Given that the majority of gun violence is suicide, it makes sense to continue the ERPO. For this reason I support it and it's expansion.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass an Extreme Risk Protection Order law, in 1999. It offers a means of last resort to temporarily remove firearms from individuals judged to be at risk of imminent harm to themselves or others. It has been shown to prevent firearm suicide and stop mass shootings. It is time to strengthen the law so that it works harder to prevent gun violence. In particular, when the protection order expires, it should be a requirement that the subject is no longer at risk of violence before the firearms are returned. That is not the case now.

Opponents of the bill claim that ERPOs lack due process protections and are abused by family members. Neither of these is true. An ex parte process is used that is virtually the same as the one used for issuing domestic violence restraining orders and the subject is entitled to a court hearing, presided over by a Judge, before the order is extended beyond 14 days. There is no evidence that the process is used to harass gun owners; judges are required to have clear and convincing evidence to issue final risk protection orders.

Claims by opponents that ERPO laws violate due process have no merit. According to the Giffords Law Center, no court has invalidated an extreme risk protection order or risk-warrant law. Courts in Connecticut, Indiana, and Florida that have heard challenges to ERPO laws have held they do not violate the due process and/or are constitutional under the Second Amendment. There is no evidence that the process is used to harass gun owners. Judges are required to have clear and convincing evidence to issue final risk protection orders.

Because there are often warning signs preceding violent or suicidal behavior this last-resort temporary removal measure with due process protections is an effective tool for reducing gun violence. Because firearm suicide accounts for up to two-thirds of gun deaths and is the second leading cause of suicide in Connecticut, there is an urgent need to strengthen our ERPO law to help it save more lives.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law so that it works harder to prevent firearm suicide and homicide. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Charlie Galliher

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